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# **A champion sport off the diamond: Softball New Zealand and their structural relationships with associations**

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A Dissertation  
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## Abstract

Softball New Zealand (SNZ) currently adopts a district model of governance, where the national sport organisation (NSO) works directly with 22 affiliated district sport organisations (DSOs) of which clubs are affiliated to. Softball is one of only two sports that use this model. Most other sports in New Zealand adopt a four-tier model, known as the traditional model, where clubs are affiliated to DSOs that affiliate to a regional sports organisation (RSO). Those RSOs affiliate to the NSO who are the head of the sport in the country. Nine in depth semi-structured interviews took place and document analysis was employed to determine why SNZ uses a district model, why they haven't changed to a different model, what benefits and drawbacks are of the different models, and what model SNZ should be using.

Most people interviewed from the softball community believed that SNZ should change their structure and, considering their recent decrease in staff, it could be timely to do so. Under a district model, SNZ have to manage relationships with 22 DSOs, but if they move to a traditional model, as recommended, they will only have approximately eight regions to work with. It would then be the RSO's responsibility to assist the DSOs.

A key drawback of a traditional model of governance is the possibility that DSOs may not be well supported but this can be overcome by DSOs, RSOs and NSOs entering into interorganisational relationships. Considering the organisations are all trying to achieve similar goals, they could support each other and share resources and knowledge in an interorganisational relationship.

**Keywords:** interorganisational relationships, sport governance, governance, national sport organisation, softball, federal model.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Sport is a part of New Zealand's national identity, partly due to the fact that we 'punch above our weight' and achieve international sporting acclaim significantly higher than what the lower population and geographical isolation would suggest (Sam, 2015). This success can be attributed to the efforts of National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) who are responsible for supporting high performance athletes and teams, and providing opportunities for their affiliated members (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010).

Most people who play sport<sup>1</sup> are members of a club which is affiliated to a regional or district association, which is, in turn, affiliated to the NSO of the respective sport. There are many different ways of modelling these layers of affiliation. In New Zealand, softball is one of only two sports that have no regional affiliation, with 22 district associations affiliated to Softball New Zealand (SNZ). As literature suggests good governance of sport organisations is critical (Kikulis, 2000), NSOs must determine how they are going to model their governance.

This research investigates the case of softball due to the rarity of its selected structural model of governance and my personal connection to the sport as a previous employee of SNZ. The main objective of this research is to examine why SNZ has not moved to a model that involves regional affiliation when most other NSOs have, and how this resulted positively or negatively on their relationships with their associations and performance. One of the aims is to understand the different models sports can adopt and examine the benefits

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<sup>1</sup> Sport in this sense is in reference to traditional, organised competitive sport.

and drawbacks of each by analysing the cases of Softball New Zealand and Hockey New Zealand, and reviewing documents of other New Zealand NSOs. A final goal is to determine what model may be best suited to SNZ and make recommendations on how they can successfully manage relationships with their affiliated associations.

This research hopes to fill a gap in the current literature and add to the body of knowledge in the sport sector by connecting sport governance, interorganisational relationships and structural sport models of governance. Governance has received significant scholarly attention and, more recently, literature has adapted governance to a sporting context (Ferkins, Shilbury & O'Boyle, 2017; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). There has also been some literary attention towards interorganisational relationships (Babiak, 2007; Sotiriadou, Brouwers, De Bosscher & Cuskelly, 2017) however very few studies have connected the theory with sport governance. This report is the first of its kind to link sport governance, interorganisational relationships and structural models of governance.

Following the introduction, the second chapter presents a review of the literature that relates to the study. It examines sport governance theories and assesses resource dependency theory, agency theory, stakeholder theory, institutional theory and power theory. Interorganisational relationships are also reviewed and the process of creating them is identified. The literature review then goes on to assess collaborative governance and structural models of sport governance.



The third chapter outlines the methods and processes used to gather data. It outlines the nature of a case study and cross-case analysis, and describes how interviews were conducted and how participants were selected. The use of document analysis is also described and author positionality is addressed.

Following the methods, the results are presented based on the themes and trends that arose from the research, and discussed in relation to the literature. The dissertation concludes by summarising the research, making recommendations for SNZ and suggesting potential areas for future research. References are listed on the final pages of the dissertation.

## 2.0 Literature Review

There is a distinct lack of academic literature directly examining National Sporting Organisations' (NSOs') regional structures and the relationships between the organisations. There are, however, some relevant theoretical concepts: governance theories, collaborative governance, interorganisational relationships and structural models of sport governance. The literature on these concepts will be reviewed below.

### 2.1 Governance of NSOs

Across many Western nations, the sport industry is in a transition period where many organisations are becoming more professionalised, moving away from a volunteer-based administration and from amateur ethos to a more corporate and professional style of management (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Yeh & Taylor, 2008). As NSOs professionalise in a managerial sense, they realised the need to identify suitable structures of governance that enable good business practice within the sport industry in which they operate (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). The sport industry is quite unique in the fact that it measures success rather differently to corporate entities. In a corporate context, success is predominantly determined by profit margins whereas most sport organisations evaluate their success using a number of different measures. These measures may include the number of championship wins, positive games results, participation rates, contributions to health and wellbeing, and their influence on social capital among their membership and wider locality (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). While there are a number of corporate businesses in the sporting industry, including sporting goods manufacturers and athlete management businesses, this research focuses predominantly on sports organisations who provide opportunities to members and fall into the not-for-profit category.

Governance is a critical feature of effective management of a sport organisation (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). 'Sport governance' is a much-debated term with no mutually agreed definition (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007). Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) recognise that most definitions of sport governance involve the key concepts of direction, control and regulation, usually through a board or committee. Kikulis (2000) attempted to capture the essence of sport governance by suggesting governance was the responsibility of setting the strategic direction of the organisation. Kikulis (2000) also highlighted that governance should be an essential and institutionalised component of all sporting organisations, including NSOs, Regional Sporting Organisations (RSOs), District Sporting Organisations (DSOs) and clubs. Failure to have a suitable governance structure in place to control and monitor a sports organisation could result in sponsorship withdrawal, decline in membership, and possible intervention from external agencies (Yeh & Taylor, 2008).

As governance focusses primarily on strategic direction, a key priority of governance boards is to maintain focus on their strategic role and avoiding involvement in operational activities. Some literature, in both the corporate and not-for-profit sectors, has suggested strategic activities, such as policy development, are the primary focus of governance boards and successful operations come as a result of this (Carver, 2006; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). However, Edwards and Cornforth (2003) state that in the not-for-profit sporting sector the boundary between strategic and operational becomes often blurred. They argue that sometimes this is necessary, as the board may better understand strategic issues by being exposed to operational activities. A key challenge for a board is to determine their level of involvement in operational activities to assist their strategic planning.

Although governance is crucial for all sporting organisations, there has been consensus among some literature that there is no single method of governance that will be successful for all not-for-profit sport organisations (Bradshaw, 2009; Hill, Kerr & Kobayashi, 2016; Lowther, Digannaro, Borgogni & Lowther, 2016). Lowther et al. (2016) state that good governance in not-for-profit sport organisations is not simple and linear but is a holistic and delicate system. Each sport body should, therefore, build on their operating strengths and adopt a governance approach that reflects this. Likewise, Bradshaw's (2009) 'contingency' theory suggests that not-for-profit organisations should adopt different methods of governance based on a number of contingencies, such as the organisation's size, age, structure and external circumstances. Hill et al. (2016) add to the argument, by noting that there are a few governance manuals and models that not-for-profit sport organisations are encouraged to adopt, however, sport clubs can be effective using governance structures that deviate from those suggested models.

Governance of a NSO is usually conducted by a board and, as Hoye and Cuskelly (2007) suggest, they are responsible for ensuring the organisation achieves their mission without striving to make a profit, while guaranteeing benefits of success are delivered to members. Yeh and Taylor (2008) analysed the key roles of the board of a sports organisation and concluded there were 11 main responsibilities (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Board Roles (Yeh & Taylor, 2008, p.8, recreated by author).**

	<b>General board roles in a sport organisation</b>
1	Develop, formulate and monitor strategies
2	Formulate policies
3	Enhance the organisation's public image
4	Review and monitor managerial activities and performance
5	Report to members and stakeholders
6	Employ, evaluate, provide advice and reward executive staff
7	Ensure organisational compliance with related legislations
8	Manage financial resources
9	Develop a risk management plan
10	Self-assess
11	Initiate board development activities.

As this is a general list of roles of sports organisation boards, it is important to note that these roles will differ slightly between boards as they adopt different theories of governance.

## 2.2 Governance theories

There is no singular governance theory that covers all roles to the same extent as each theory has different priorities (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). The key governance theories in relation to sports boards are resource dependency theory, agency theory, stakeholder theory, institutional theory and power theory. Although there is a growing body of research on theories of sport governance, the theories and frameworks discussed below are based on corporate governance but provide a foundation for sport governance. Each theory has its

drawbacks as no single theory can be used to fully explain the unique nature of sporting governance and board roles of not-for-profit sport organisations.

### *2.21 Resource dependency theory*

Much research on not-for-profit boards is centred on the resource dependency theory (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). The central component of this theory is that organisations do not operate in a vacuum and are “open systems”. In fact, they must adapt to changes in the external environment and heavily rely on other organisations for information and resources (Scott, 2003). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) suggest that for an organisation to survive they must be capable of acquiring and maintaining resources, and the board of directors must be able to connect with external resources. Cornforth (2003) suggests that due to this heavy reliance on other organisations, the board’s key role is to maintain good relationships with said organisations to ensure a continued supply of resources. When Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) analysed the structural governance model change of Tennis New Zealand, more worthwhile relationships with associations meant the Tennis New Zealand board could better share and gather information and resources from their associations.

### *2.22 Agency theory*

Agency theory surrounds the ideas that the board is mostly responsible for managing the relationship between CEOs (agents) and owner (principals). The board must ensure managerial behaviour is monitored to guarantee organisational activities are aligned with the interests of the principals (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). Given that most not-for-profit sporting organisations do not have specified owner, principals in this context are considered to be the people that receive the benefits of organisational achievements, which includes

members, clients, volunteers and sponsors. Agents are considered to be the paid staff of an organisation, most notably the chief executive officer (CEO) (Yeh & Taylor, 2008).

Generally, agents are considered to have different motives than the principles, and therefore CEOs need to be closely monitored by the board (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). A board adopting the agency theory would control managerial activities of staff to ensure they were meeting the expectations of members and other principals. They would put a lot of focus on hiring, replacing and monitoring staff, as well as connecting with agents to learn their desires (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). While agency theory is adaptable for many sports boards, some argue that it is too simplified, suggesting there are only two types of participants, principals and agents. In reality, organisations are influenced by many more factors (Yeh & Taylor, 2008).

### *2.23 Stakeholder theory*

Stakeholder theory suggests that board (and other governing bodies) must consider the individuals and groups affected by the organisation, regarded as stakeholders, when planning and making decisions. Yeh and Taylor (2008) add that relationships with stakeholders is very important and organisations are responsible for governing these relationships. In the not-for-profit sporting sector there are many stakeholders to consider, such as sponsors, members, volunteers, staff and the governments (local and national) (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). Yeh and Taylor (2008) also contend that the key role of a board which adopts stakeholder theory is to balance the interests of the various stakeholders, and understand and satisfy the stakeholders' needs and desires.

Stakeholder theory may not be suitable for all governance boards, as Ferkins and Shilbury (2010, p.236) state “there is much debate, however, regarding the extent to which boards should be representative of their stakeholders”. Sternberg (1997) argues that stakeholder theory is incompatible with organisational objectives and can undermine accountability, while Stoney (2001), on the other hand, suggests it is a relevant theory for both not-for-profit sporting organisations and corporate businesses.

Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) analysed a structural change of Tennis New Zealand to move from 25 district associations to six regions and realised this better enhanced the relationship between the NSO (tennis New Zealand) and its associations. By having less associations to work with, the Tennis New Zealand board were able to develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with their stakeholders, the six associations.

#### *2.24 Institutional theory*

Institutional theory emphasises the importance of normative structure and rules as a means of directing and constraining organisational behaviours. The key concept of institutional theory is that patterns of behaviour and expectations evolve over time and become legitimated. It suggests the organisation changes and adapts itself (structurally and behaviourally) to meet normative or moral guidelines (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). In institutional theory, a board may focus more on attending meetings, adhering to laws and regulations, and filing documents to ensure requirements and guidelines are met.

Institutional theory also has a flaw in the fact that it does not explain why and how organisations resist change (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). Some resistance may come from a lack of

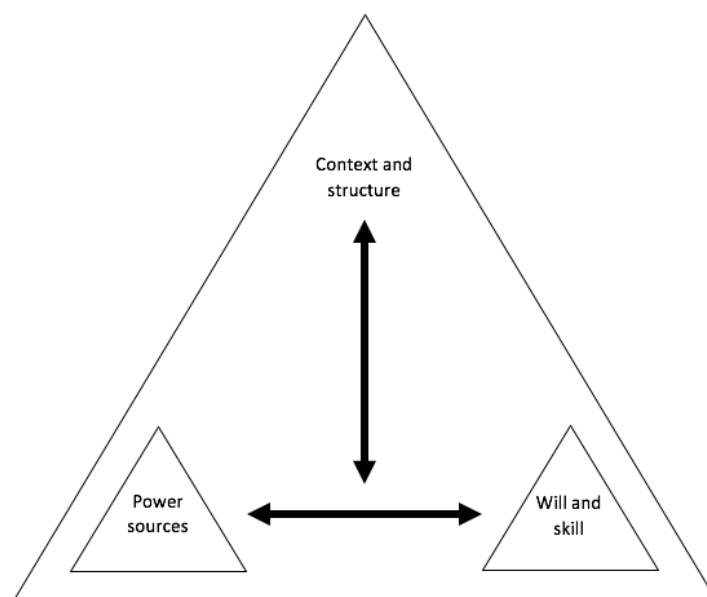


understanding of a change, fear that change is expensive, or a belief that change may be risky and unproven to be successful. When faced with resistance, the board may have to enter into negotiations with members to ensure change is accepted, or develop alternative strategies. Failure to adhere to change can be dangerous and costly for many not-for-profit sport organisations, as failure to adapt to changes and comply with institutional expectations may result in decreased funding from government organisations (Yeh & Taylor, 2009).

### *2.25 Power theory*

Power is a term often present in a governance context and can be used to explain the relationship between the board and executive staff members (Hoye, 2006). To represent this relationship with power, Pettigrew and McNulty (1995) created a tripartite model of power and influence (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Tripartite analysis of power and influence (Pettigrew & McNulty, 1995, p.845, recreated by author)**



Pettigrew and McNulty (1995) asserted that the power and influence of board members is shaped by the effects of structural and contextual factors, skill in mobilising power, and skill and will in converting power into influence. They suggest that changing structural and contextual factors, such as, alterations to board composition, bureaucratisation, and professionalization impact on the strategic role of the board (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003). Power mobilisation includes aspects such as stakeholder representation, sources of power and the situational nature of power (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003). Power sources, or the lack thereof, can also influence a board's strategic capability (Pettigrew & McNulty, 1995). Will and skill of individual members acknowledges the impact of individual personalities on the board, willingness to intervene and individual abilities (Pettigrew and McNulty, 1995). The individual ability of board members has a significant influence on the strategic capability of a sports board as inadequate board members will not make suitable decisions (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). The relationship between these three aspects is important, each aspect influences the other and together they result in the overall power and influence of board (Pettigrew & McNulty, 1995).

While sport governance has been increasingly researched in recent years, the focus remains on roles, functions and capabilities of boards. There have only been a few studies conducted to examine the structure of NSOs and their relationships with regional/district associations. In order to understand relationships among NSOs, RSOs, DSOs and clubs, this study employs the concept of 'interorganisational relationship' which will be explored below.

## 2.3 Interorganisational relationships

Interorganisational relationships (IORs) are essentially relationships or partnerships between two or more organisations. These relationships often involve organisations trying to achieve similar goals or mutual benefits by sharing resources, power, information, work or support with others (Sotiriadou et al, 2017). There are many different types of IORs, with partnerships being the most common (linkages and outsourcing services are also considered types of IORs) (Sotiriadou et al., 2017). IORs have often been used to describe cross-sectoral partnerships, between not-for-profit organisations, government and private sectors while little have applied the framework of the IORs to multiple not-for-profit organisations. IORs have seldom been linked with governance and governance theories, particularly there have been very few specifically linking national and regional sport relationships to board capability (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) were one of the first to conclude that board strategic capability is significantly impacted by IORs, as a NSO board could be more effective if it had collaborative partnerships with its regional associations (see the next section on collaborative governance). These partnerships would not only benefit the NSO but also would improve regional capabilities by sharing power. IORs have three stages of evolution and implementation; formation, management and evaluation (Babiak, 2007). These stages are interrelated and impact one another, and are discussed below.

The concept of IORs will be applied to relationships among NSOs, RSOs, DSOs and clubs. This is the first study of its kind to employ the concept of IORs in this way. There are seldom other studies to link governance theories to IORs.

### *2.31 Formation of IORs*

The formation stage mostly surrounds the different motivations organisations have for entering into an IOR (Babiak, 2007; Oliver, 1990). These motivations include necessity (legal or regulatory reasons), asymmetry (exercise power or control over other organisations), reciprocity (achieve mutual goals), efficiency (improve output), stability (to be more adaptive to environmental changes), and legitimacy (comply with norms or rules) (Oliver, 1990; Sotiriadou et al., 2017). Babiak (2007) added that individual-level factors, such as personal belief, history, experiences and personal interactions, were also a big motivational factor for entering into IORs. Babiak (2007) also suggested, in the sport industry, organisations can be motivated to enter into IORs based on the scarcity of resources and the large dependency on external sources (government, sponsorship, lotteries) for funding. Entering into an IOR can therefore make some organisations feel more secure (Babiak, 2007).

Sotiriadou et al. (2017) analysed IORs between Tennis federations (RSOs) and clubs and found that the most predominant motivations for clubs to enter into IORs was individual-level factors, reciprocity, and efficiency, meanwhile federations were more motivated by legitimacy and asymmetry.

Two organisations entering into an IOR may have differing motives although it may not be an issue so long as partners explain their reasons to each other and identify organisational and individual values underlying their motives. If partners are not clear and honest with one another about their motives, power struggles and conflicts can arise (Sotiriadou et al., 2017).

### *2.32 Management of IORs*

The success of an IOR is influenced by many different factors. Sotiriadou, et al. (2017, p.63) state these factors include “resource and information sharing, objectives and strategies, communication, trust, commitment, consistency, dependability, balance, mutuality, coordination, engagement, authority, responsibility, autonomy, monitoring and reporting, personal contact, relationship management competencies, operational competencies and relational competencies”.

Considering the number of factors involved, literature has evolved to differentiate the factors into two groups based on formal controls and informal (social) processes (Babiak & Thibault, 2008). Formal controls are factors such as developing guidelines and reports, outlining objectives, and identifying roles and responsibilities. Informal (social) processes includes mutual trust, commitment and communication (Babiak & Thibault, 2008). From Babiak and Thibault’s (2008) research, it was determined that in the sporting context, informal processes were more prevalent in IORs. The IORs in the sporting context they researched were of a loose nature and formal controls were deemed to risk trust.

Managing IORs is evidently a complex process and there are a number of challenges that can pose a risk to partnerships. Managerial incompetencies, such as poor governance, lack of formalised policy and lack of human resource can put strain on IORs (Sotiriadou, et al. 2017). Another factor, somewhat unique to the not-for-profit sporting industry, is the fact that organisations in IORs may be competing for the same resources, such as government funding and skilled athletes (Babiak & Thibault, 2008). Rivalry between organisations in an IOR can add tension to partnerships and may result in frustration.

### *2.33 Evaluation of IORs*

Evaluation is an important, yet often overlooked, final stage of an IOR. Parent and Harvey (2009) stated that there are many different types of evaluations that should take place in a partnership. They suggest that evaluation of collective results should be ongoing throughout the course of the partnership. Short-term effects of partnership programmes and initiatives should be evaluated, as well as the long-term goal and objectives. Evaluation should also happen immediately, as feedback is encouraged during activities the IOR initiates, and summative feedback should be provided at the conclusion of projects (Parent & Harvey, 2008).

In their research on the IORs, Sotiriadou, et al. (2017) discovered that the two types of organisations (RSOs and clubs) had similar goals in aiming to develop athletes. This reciprocal idea is grounds for an IOR that could provide benefits to both organisations, as well as their affiliated members, as organisations could work together on athlete development, coach development, and seek financial benefits from shared resources (Sotiriadou, et al., 2017). In the interest of sport development, one could understand how IORs between NSOs, RSOs, DSOs and clubs could be of benefit to all parties involved and help achieve mutual goals.

### *2.4 Collaborative Governance*

Some recent literature has highlighted the potentiality for collaborative governance among sport organisations (Ferkins et al., 2017; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015; Shilbury, O'Boyle &

Ferkins, 2016). Much like the literature on IORs, collaborative governance is often linked to cross-sector collaboration, which is where two or more parties work together to achieve common goals and produce more successful outcomes than if they had worked independently (Vangen, Hayes & Cornforth, 2015). In reference to sport, cross-sector collaboration occurs regularly through mega-events such as the Olympic Games, where central government works alongside international sporting federations, local government, corporate businesses and NSOs to deliver and host an Olympic event (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015; Shilbury et al., 2016). Sport organisations on their own would not have the capacity to provide sufficient infrastructure and resources for such an event.

Collaborative governance is defined by Ansell and Gash (2008) as a “governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programmes or assets” (p.544).

Shilbury and Ferkins (2015) summarise this as “a variety of public and private organisations enter into agreements to achieve goals that further their organisational interests” (p.380).

In an instance of collaborative governance, a number of interdependent stakeholders will address a complex, multi-faceted situation by working together to develop and implement solutions (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015).

Collaborative governance is becoming more popular among central governments and businesses to complete tasks that would usually be too big for one entity to achieve alone (Shilbury et al., 2016). Despite originating in public administration (Ansell & Gash, 2008) collaborative governance is relevant to sport organisations that operate in countries where

sport is supported by central government policy and funding, such as New Zealand and Australia (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015). In these instances, the central governments believe sport is of value to their people so invest in the not-for-profit organisations that deliver opportunities to citizens (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015). Shilbury et al. (2016) believe collaborative governance could provide a theoretical base for future sport governance research as many sport associations in New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom operate under a structure that may be suited to adopt a collaborative governance regime (Shilbury et al., 2016).

Shilbury et al. (2016) and Ansell and Gash (2008) state a collaborative form of governance may be appealing to governments because it allows work to be performed more effectively and with a strong market-driven approach. Many NSOs in New Zealand operate under a model where RSOs and DSOs run their own governance models and operate as an independent entity. This means that there is often a challenge for all organisations in a sport to adopt a whole-of-sport approach to governance. Each member organisation operates to its own agendas and is primarily focused on the performance of its own organisation, with a secondary interest in whole-of-sport strategies (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015; Shilbury et al., 2016). Collaborative governance could be successful among sport organisations so long as each member organisation feels they have sufficiently contributed to governance decisions and the strategic direction. If they are satisfied with their contribution, they are more likely to comply with the agreed strategy and implement it in their own organisations (Shilbury et al., 2016). Some believe that collaborative governance may not be successful as often stakeholders have adversarial relationships towards one another, but Ansell and Gash



(2008) discovered that these indifferences and conflicts are put aside as they work towards a common goal and turn negative relationships into cooperative ones.

## 2.5 Structural models of sport governance

Literature has identified two key structural models of sport governance, the first of which is the Federal Model. Ferkins et al. (2017, p. 4) describe the Federal Model as being applicable “where decision-making and the power structure are generally divided between a national governing body and state or regional associations”. The Federal Model is very common in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and some parts of the Europe; essentially most places where sport is managed by not-for-profit organisations (Ferkins et al., 2017; O’Boyle & Shilbury, 2016; Shilbury et al., 2016). Under a federal model, responsibility for governance lies mostly with the NSO and territorial organisations (RSOs and DSOs), all of which are separate legal entities with their own governance and strategy (O’Boyle & Shilbury, 2016; Shilbury et al., 2016). NSO and territorial organisations share power and responsibility for developing the sport, in areas of both participation and high performance (Ferkins et al., 2017; O’Boyle & Shilbury, 2016). Often RSOs and DSOs enjoy their autonomy and can act in their best self-interests (Ferkins et al., 2017) but there is often a situation where the NSO and all territorial authorities are attempting to achieve similar goal with little or no collaboration (Shilbury, Ferkins & Smythe, 2013).

The second model of sport governance is the unitary model. The primary difference in this model is that the NSO holds the balance of power within a sport, with the NSO board deciding policy, strategic direction, allocation of resources, and ultimately how the sport manages high performance and participation throughout the whole country (O’Boyle & Shilbury, 2016;

Sport New Zealand, 2014). Any RSOs and/or DSOs would no longer exist, possibly replaced by offices staffed by the NSO or nothing at all (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016; Sport New Zealand, 2014). Boards of pre-existing RSOs and/or DSOs surrender their power and decision-making legitimacy to the NSO, who then have to govern the entire geographical area of the country (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016). Under the unitary model, the NSO works directly with members or clubs (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016; Sport New Zealand, 2014).

This review has highlighted the key aspects of sport governance and the different theories of governance sport organisations can adopt. By analysing IORs, reviewing collaborative governance and identifying two models of sport governance, the review has identified a number of themes in the literature. Seldom have these themes been linked together which has left a gap in the literature.

### 3.0 Methods

This research is of a qualitative nature and adopted a case study approach. Case studies allow the researcher to conduct an in-depth investigation of a topic to determine what is occurring in a particular environment (Yin, 2003). Case studies are also beneficial in determining how and why things happen (Yin, 2003). As this research aimed to examine how Softball New Zealand (SNZ) managed its relationships with associations, and why they operated under their current selected structure, a case study research method was fitting. Yin (2003) also notes that the essence of a case study is the focus on decisions people or organisations have made, why they made them, how they were implemented and what the result was. Understanding SNZ's relationships with their affiliated associations essentially originates from decisions they have made.

For this research, two organisations were selected and investigated, resulting in a multiple case analysis (also known as cross-case analysis). Yin (2003) suggests cross-case analysis is often easier than single-case analysis, and provides more robust results which strengthens the investigation. The research focused primarily on the case of SNZ, and also used the comparative case of Hockey New Zealand (HNZ). SNZ was selected due to its nature being one of only two NSOs in New Zealand to follow a district structure. HNZ was selected as a secondary case due to its structure contrasting from softball's. From my own involvement in the sport, I had prior knowledge that HNZ had put considerable thought and analysis into their structure, which they are currently reviewing. Investigating both organisations provided sufficient ground for comparative analysis and thus more robust results than only investigating one.

To further enhance a case study, Yin (2003) recommends using multiple sources of data to develop results so document analysis was employed as a secondary means of collecting results. Document analysis provided some interesting insights into governance of organisations, and also helped direct interview questions and supplement interview findings. Formal documentation was gathered from public websites of sports associations and Sport New Zealand, and was requested from sport association staff. Documents analysed included strategic plans, governance documents, annual reports, meeting minutes, business plans and policy documents.

For semi-structured interviews, initial interview participants were selected using purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher determines who will be invited for interviews based on the individuals' expertise and experience in the subject (Flick, 2011). Latter interview participants were selected using a snowball sampling method, where interviews participants were asked who else may be suitable to be interviewed. When purposively selecting interview participants, I sought out individuals who had been involved in softball for many years from a variety of associations and geographical locations. This selection of participants was based on my own knowledge and experience as to who met the criteria. Some staff and board members of SNZ were invited to be interviewed, based on their direct influence on relationship and structure decisions SNZ made. A number of experienced staff, volunteers and members of affiliated SNZ associations were also selected, as they were directly impacted by decisions made by SNZ. Interviewees were selected from a number of associations of varying sizes and geographical location. Initially, eight

individuals were invited to participate, and four of them accepted. The additional two interviewees from the softball community were selected as they were suggested by previous interview participants and met the criteria of being involved in softball for a number of years in different roles, and were from different associations and locations than previous interview participants. Three individuals from the hockey community were invited to participate in interviews. All of them accepted and met the criteria of being heavily involved in hockey for a number of years, influenced or were influenced by relationship and structure decisions by HNZ, and were from various locations and associations.

In total, nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the New Zealand softball and hockey communities. These interviews took place between August and November 2017. Individuals were either emailed or verbally spoken to describe the nature of the research and the interview process. Once the participant agreed to be interviewed, the interview was conducted at the time and location that were mutually agreed upon. The interviews took between 28 and 65 minutes, and each participant signed a consent form agreeing for the interview to be audio-recorded. The interviewee also chose an alias to be known as throughout the dissertation to maintain their anonymity. The participants were asked how they would like to be referred to in regards to their position in their sports organisations. It was decided that Tim and Geoff would be referred to as staff of SNZ but did not want their job titles identified. Karen, Valerie, Rylee and Nicole will be referenced by their role (staff member, board member, volunteer) and the size of association they come from. Karen is a staff member of a large softball association, Valerie is a volunteer of a small softball association, and Rylee and Nicole are board members of a

medium-sized associations. All of these participants are from different associations.

Cameron, Jessica and Rebecca from the hockey community will be referred to by their role in their organisations. Cameron is a staff member of HNZ, Jessica is a staff member of a DSO and Rebecca is a staff member of a RSO.

After interviews took place the audio-recordings were transcribed by the researcher and coded to determine identified themes, trends and descriptions. These were then analysed resulting in a number of key findings and recommendations. Interview participants were regularly communicated with to ensure data and interpretation were accurate.

### 3.1 Researcher positionality

Interview participants were chosen based on their suitability to meet the interview criteria, but they were also partly selected based on my personal connection with them. Many refer to this as 'insider research' (Hodkinson, 2005; Merton, 1972; Peachtree, 2012), as the researchers themselves are aware of the process, culture and people being researched. An 'outsider' would have to submerge themselves into a new culture to gather results (Pechter, 2012). Pechter (2012) argues being an 'insider' provides better access to participants, better direction for interview questions and makes the researcher less likely to be misled.

As a previous employee of SNZ, I personally knew all of the interview participants, and selected them based on my knowledge of their softball involvement and experience. I also

have extensive experience in hockey at a national level, so had connections in the hockey community in New Zealand. I found being an 'insider' indeed made accessing potential participants simple and I felt I could easily understand the comments and references interviewees were making. I did, however, consider that, being an employee of SNZ and asking questions about the employer and, evidently, other staff I work alongside, some people may have been hesitant to make negative comments about the organisation and its operation. In order to cover a variety of perspectives, I ensured I re-emphasised the anonymous nature of the research to reassure participants.

## 4.0 Results and discussion

### 4.1 Unitary model of governance

Sport New Zealand's (2014) *Nine steps to effective governance* outlines some sport governance structures, one of these being the unitary model, which O'Boyle and Shilbury (2016) identified in the literature. Sport New Zealand (2014) describe the unitary model as being a model of governance where the NSO has centralised authority. According to Sport New Zealand (2014), under a unitary model, the board of the NSO hold the balance of power and set the strategic direction for the sport for the whole country, and DSOs and RSOs do not exist. The only legal members of the NSO are individuals and the NSO is the only legal entity. In regards to constitutional matters and board composition, individual members vote instead of RSOs and DSOs voting on their behalf (Sport New Zealand, 2014). This description reflects the statements made by O'Boyle and Shilbury (2016) in the literature. In some cases, regions will have offices which are staffed by NSO employees, who will help manage local athletes and activities. Figure 2 demonstrates the structure of a unitary model of governance based on Sport New Zealand's (2014) descriptions.



**Figure 2: Unitary model of governance.**



After research into New Zealand NSO websites and policy documents, the only sport in the country that follows a unitary model of governance was triathlon. In the case of Triathlon New Zealand, individual athletes are affiliated directly to Triathlon New Zealand and vote as individuals in General Meetings. According to the Triathlon New Zealand website and their most recent Annual Report, individuals can register with Triathlon New Zealand as a TRIBE member which allows them to compete in many triathlon events across New Zealand (Triathlon New Zealand, 2017a; Triathlon New Zealand, 2017b). In the 2016/2017 season, 1494 people registered as a TRIBE members (Triathlon New Zealand, 2017a). Triathlon is primarily an events based sport (rather than regular competition) which may explain why clubs, RSOs and DSOs are not prevalent and why the sport opted for a unitary model.

None of the interviewees mentioned the unitary model, or proposed any model ideas that slightly resembled it. As it is not a very popular model among New Zealand sport organisations, it can be questioned whether people are even aware of it as a governance option. As organised club sport through a RSO or DSO has become an ingrained part of the New Zealand culture (Sam 2009), one may question whether totally removing those organisations would even be considered by many New Zealanders. It also seems that a unitary model would be more suited to individual sports, like triathlon. There could be much confusion around team sports following a unitary model, as people decide how to form a team from individual members without club, RSO or DSO institutions bringing them together.

Although it wasn't apparent in the results, a perceived key benefit of a unitary model of governance would be the NSO's ability to enforce a whole-of-sport strategy that applies to all participants. In other models where RSOs and DSOs exist, they often develop their own strategies that differ from those of the NSO. By having no RSOs or DSOs, sports operating under a unitary model can be assured that all activities in the country are in line with strategic goals of the NSO. A perceived drawback of a unitary model could be the pressure on the NSO board to make decisions that are going to impact the entire country. It may be difficult for a board to represent the opinions of all of their members considering there are so many of them spread across a vast geographical expanse.

It would be difficult for a sport that adopts a unitary model to operate under a resource dependency theory of governance. As the NSO is the only organisation of that sport in the country, they have no other similar organisations to share knowledge and resources with. They may have some relationships with other NSOs but, without having RSOs, DSOs and clubs to share resources with, it is unlikely that a resource dependency model would be successful. It may also be difficult for a sport operating under a unitary model to govern with stakeholder theory, as the key stakeholders would be the individual members (in Triathlon New Zealand's case, 1494 people). Instead of working to the needs and desires of a number of RSOs or DSOs, the NSO should consider the entire membership as they are the direct stakeholders, alongside many sponsors, volunteers and staff. Agency theory, institutional theory and power theory may be better theories of governance for a NSO operating under a unitary model to adopt.

Under a unitary model of governance, IORs would likely not exist as there is only one legal entity in the sport in the country, which is the NSO. As there are no RSOs or DSOs, it is likely that IORs do not and could not form. It may only be possible if NSOs to work with other NSOs from around the world, however this could be difficult based on cultural and political differences which may impact on the nature of sport in other countries.

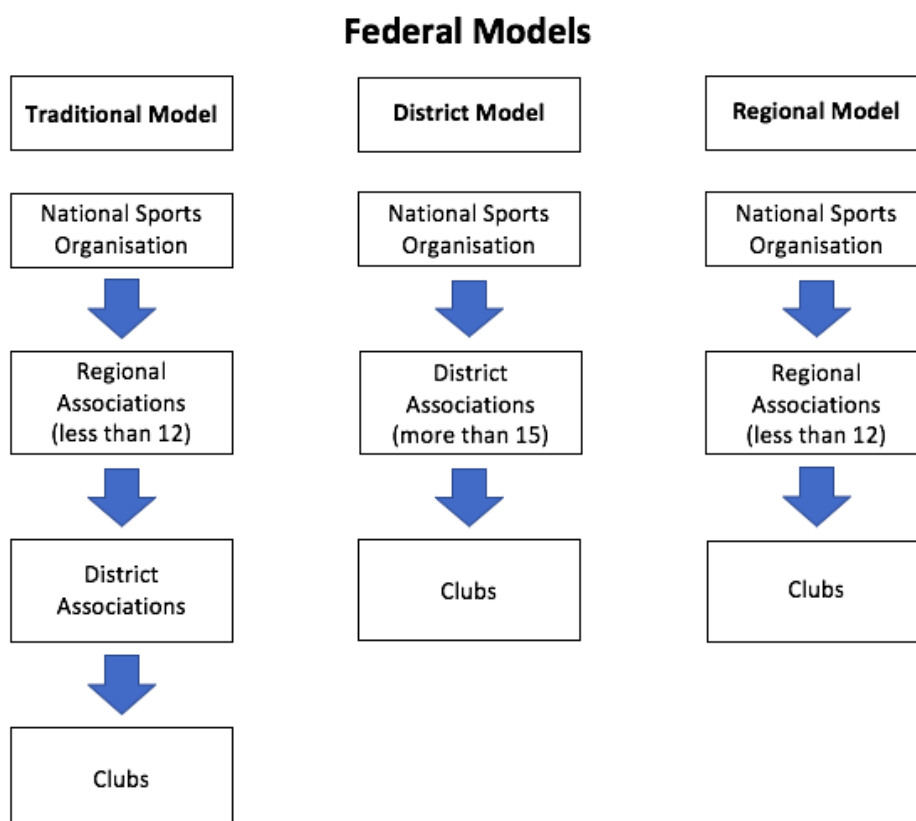
#### 4.2 Federal model of governance

According to Sport New Zealand (2014), the federal model of governance popular in New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain and in many parts of Europe. By analysing websites and documents from New Zealand NSOs, organisations that operate a federal model have two

or more layers of governance based on regions, districts, branches or clubs (Hockey New Zealand, 2015; Netball New Zealand, n.d.; New Zealand Cricket, n.d.; Tennis New Zealand, n.d.b). Each organisation (NSO, RSO, DSO, Club) governs independently and have their own individual legal status, usually as an incorporated society (New Zealand Cricket, n.d.; Hockey New Zealand, 2015; Netball New Zealand, n.d.; Tennis New Zealand, n.d.b). Each organisation also has a lot of autonomy and determines their own strategic direction and activities (Sport New Zealand, 2014). Sport New Zealand (2014) describe the structure and state that, although the NSO is the head of the sport, their authority is limited as they are controlled by their owners and affiliates (RSOs and DSOs) who vote on constitutional matters and board composition. Likewise, RSOs and DSOs are controlled by their affiliated clubs. These aspects of the federal model reflect those identified in the literature by Ferkins et al. (2017), O'Boyle and Shilbury (2016) and Shilbury et al. (2016). Analysis of NSO websites and governance documents has identified that the federal model is very popular in New Zealand, with almost every sport adopting it in some form.

The literature identified that the federal model of governance was in fact a legitimate structural model of governance (Ferkins et al., 2017; O'Boyle and Shilbury, 2016; Shilbury et al., 2016) but this study has discovered that there are three key ways this model can be applied. These sub-models have been labelled as 'traditional model', a term used by Sport New Zealand to name the corresponding model, and the 'regional' and 'district' models which I have named based on their characteristics. These models are illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Federal sub-models of governance**



#### 4.21 Traditional Model

As demonstrated above, the models I labelled 'district' and 'regional' have three levels, while the traditional model has four. The traditional model was identified by Sport New Zealand (2014) in their *Nine steps to effective governance* document and follows a four tier system where clubs are affiliated to DSOs, who are affiliated to RSOs, who affiliate to a NSO. Analysis of NSO websites and governance documents showed that most sports in New Zealand follow a traditional model, including tennis, netball, cricket and hockey (Hockey New Zealand, 2015; Netball New Zealand, n.d.; New Zealand Cricket, n.d.; Tennis New Zealand, n.d.b). Many interviewees also made reference to the traditional model, proving that it is somewhat well known. Each sport seems to structure their regions in different ways, with New Zealand Cricket and Tennis New Zealand both have six affiliated regions

(New Zealand Cricket, n.d.; Tennis New Zealand, n.d.b) (RSOs), Netball New Zealand having five (Netball New Zealand, n.d.) and Hockey New Zealand (HNZ) having eight (Hockey New Zealand, n.d.). Each of these RSOs has a number of DSOs or 'centres' in their region to which clubs affiliate to. One of the six netball RSOs, Netball Mainland, has eighteen affiliated DSOs or 'centres', covering a very large geographical area over the top half of the South Island (Netball Mainland, 2017). According to Sport New Zealand (2014), under the traditional model, NSOs work closely with RSOs but have little to do with the DSOs. It is more of a responsibility of the RSO to assist and work with the DSOs. The DSOs then work with their affiliated clubs.

HNZ adopted the traditional model over 10 years ago, and HNZ staff member, Cameron, said that it was a decision based on the strategic direction of the sport. He recalled that they were aiming to improve the environment and become more high performance oriented. As a result, tournaments would have more of an elite focus, with the top players from eight regions playing as opposed to over 20 district associations. When interviewed, Jess, a staff member of a DSO, said changing to a traditional structure where athletes played for their region "made the tournaments a lot better and more competitive". Jess and Rebecca, a staff member from a RSO, suggested that the traditional model provides a great high performance pathway, and the tournaments feel more professional with better quality hockey.

Cameron also noted that a key reason for the change was to make administration and communications easier for HNZ, as they only had to work with eight RSOs instead of over 20

DSOs. Jess believes the change had achieved that objective as, from her perspective, HNZ worked very well with their affiliated regions.

A benefit of the traditional model identified by Rebecca was that it takes a lot of pressure off the DSOs while still allowing them to keep their independence. She suggested that DSOs can run great competitions for their local clubs, while high performance efforts can be shared by the DSO and the RSO. She also stated that having four layers of governance means more people get employed in the sport and involved at a governance level.

Cameron, Jess and Rebecca all believed that the traditional structure worked well but Cameron suggested its success depended on a few factors. One of these is the staff employed in the RSOs. He stated that the NSOs and the RSOs need to ensure the people employed by the RSOs have the interests of the whole region at heart, not just that of the biggest DSOs in the region or the DSO they originate from. Cameron said previously, under the district model, the DSOs would get support from HNZ but now they do not have much contact. DSOs, under the traditional model, must seek support from their RSO. He suggests staff within the RSOs must consider all DSOs in their region and be in regular contact with them, providing any support or assistance where needed. Cameron stated some districts do not have the organisational or strategic capacity to operate in a challenging environment, therefore they need all the help and support they can get. If they do not get the appropriate help the sport could disintegrate and disappear from the district. Cameron concluded “the last thing you want to see is hockey disappearing from those smaller associations”.

It also became apparent that a few adjustments could be made to improve HNZ's traditional model of governance. Jess and Cameron both suggested that the spread of DSOs in the regions could be reassessed and changed slightly, moving some DSOs from one RSO to another. Cameron stated "we haven't quite got it right, but it's working pretty well". Jess provided the example of the Auckland region, highlighting a concern that Counties/Manukau, the DSO, is listed in the Midlands region, not the Auckland region. She believes this is illogical considering Counties/Manukau is considered part of Auckland City and rarely associated with the Waikato and Bay of Plenty districts in the Midlands region.

Despite the apparent benefits and strengths of the traditional model, a number of drawbacks were also identified throughout the research. Jess believes there is a lot of variance in the RSOs which can create an unfair environment at tournaments. She states that some regions cover significant geographical distance and include up to nine DSOs, while other RSOs include only one or two DSOs that are relatively close together. This could be considered unfair as organising trainings for regional teams in a geographically large RSO could be very challenging compared to RSOs that are geographically much smaller. Another issue Jess noted with this is the fact that regional representative teams are often based in one city, usually in the biggest (in terms of membership) DSO in the region. This means that people who live outside that DSO, sometimes over 200 kilometres away have to regularly travel for team training sessions. For that reason, many talented hockey players get dragged away from smaller DSOs to bigger ones. Cameron, Jess and Rebecca all identified that the inclination of talented players moving to larger DSOs was a notable drawback of the



traditional model. Rebecca noted that when talented players move away from smaller DSOs, the competition in the smaller community diminishes. Cameron added that often the small DSO are proud of their talented player for making a regional team, but get disappointed when they “forget who taught them” and move to the bigger DSO. Jess states that this inclination to move to the bigger DSO is particularly prevalent in the Canterbury region. The Canterbury RSO consists of five DSOs; Canterbury (central and north), Malvern, Mid Canterbury, South Canterbury and West Coast. Canterbury (central and north) is considerably larger in population and membership than the other four DSOs. Canterbury (central and north) is also the home of the Canterbury RSO, based in Christchurch. All players selected for Canterbury regional teams have to train at least twice a week in Christchurch. Instead of travelling every week, Jess believes that most move away from their home DSO (Malvern, Mid Canterbury, South Canterbury or West coast) to Christchurch, making training attendance easier and allowing them to play in the better quality competition, leaving their home DSO depleted.

Another drawback identified by Cameron was, although the regional tournaments are excellent, you lose some of the “provincial flare” and excitement that used to exist when over 20 DSOs took part in the same tournament. Cameron recalled there were some great district spirit shown at the tournaments and the teams had a lot of character. With the high performance nature of the regional tournaments, Cameron believes this ‘provincial flare’ is not so prevalent.

SNZ staff and members of the softball community were questioned on what they thought about the traditional structure, and whether they believed SNZ should adopt it. A staff member of SNZ, Tim, believes that SNZ should change to a traditional model as they have had to shift focus recently to become more business oriented. He thinks changing their governance model would align with that ethos. Another member of SNZ staff, Geoff, believes it would create a great high performance environment. A staff member of a large DSO, Karen, believes that a traditional model will allow a better environment for professional teams and provide improved national competitions. These points are similar to a number of realised benefits of the traditional model as identified previously by members of the hockey community.

There were a number of perceived drawbacks expressed by members of the softball community. A board member of a medium-sized DSO, Nicole, feared that DSOs in the same RSO would refuse to work together. A volunteer of a small softball association, Valerie, was concerned that her DSO would lose all support from SNZ and they would not be able to operate without sufficient help. She was also concerned that the RSO would not provide adequate assistance and they could end up in a dire situation. Geoff shared Valerie's concern about the small DSOs, but insisted RSOs would have to fill that void. A board member of a medium-sized softball association, Rylee, realised that the right staff needed to be employed by the RSO to ensure DSOs are supported, a factor Cameron previously referred to.

Valerie and Rylee expressed fears of good players from small DSOs moving to bigger ones in the same region. This is a concerning as, according to interviews with people in the hockey community, is likely to eventuate with a traditional model of governance. Some interviewees also believed that it would only benefit large associations, as they would get stronger and small associations would get weaker.

Geoff suggested that moving to a traditional model might take a bit of work as there would likely be a number of personality clashes. He said “the softball world is small and there’s a lot of people that don’t like each other. If we ask these people to work together in a regional setting, I’m not sure if it’s going to end well”. Nicole adds to this argument, mentioning that some efforts in the past to get DSOs to work together have been unsuccessful or taken a long time due to personality clashes. She recalled a situation where it took approximately a year for SNZ to organise a meeting between Hutt Valley and Wellington softball associations, despite being geographically very close together, because people in the associations did not get along.

Most people interviewed from the softball community realised that almost every other New Zealand sport operates under a traditional model, and many figured that if it works for so many others, it would likely work for softball too. Nicole realised that it seems to work for a wide variety of sports too, regardless of membership size or financial position. Geoff, Tim and a staff member of a large softball association, Karen, strongly believe SNZ need to change to the traditional model, while Rylee and Nicole both agreed that it should happen.

DSOs that operate with a traditional model may likely adopt a resource dependency theory of governance. As many interviewees mentioned, support for DSOs under a traditional model was something they were concerned about. It seems that some DSOs do not have the organisational capacity to operate completely independently and require support and assistance. As outlined in the literature by Cornforth (2003), boards that adopt a resource dependency theory of governance rely on other organisations to share information and resources, and spend considerable time ensuring they have positive relationships with these other organisations. This would be likely with DSOs in a traditional model as they need to maintain good relationships with their RSO to ensure they get the right support when needed.

A NSO board operating with a traditional model would likely adopt either agency or institutional theories of governance for their boards. The agency theory suggests that the board is responsible for managing the relationship between the CEO and the owners (Yeh & Taylor, 2008), which in this case are the RSOs. As there are only a few owners in a traditional model (up to twelve regions) it is likely that the opinions of RSOs are very important and, with a small number of RSOs, it may not be too difficult to manage their desires. Under a district model where there are over 20 DSOs affiliated to a NSO this would be much more difficult. Based on the analysis it is believed that HNZ operate with an agency theory of governance.

As outlined in the literature, institutional theory of governance emphasises the importance of normative structures and conceives that patterns of behaviour and expectations evolve over time (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). Sport New Zealand (2014) state that the traditional model is very popular in New Zealand and has become the standardised model of sport governance. It is possible that many sports adopted it because most other NSOs had, following their pattern of behaviour. Institutional theory also suggests that the board may focus more on attending meetings, adhering to laws and guidelines, and filing documents rather than channelling their efforts towards strategic activities. This is certainly possible for many NSOs that operate with a traditional model, but unlikely to be the case for HNZ as their board seem to prioritise strategy.

IORs could make traditional models of governance much more successful and take a lot of pressure off RSO and DSO staff. IORS can exist where two or more organisations, who are trying to achieve similar goals, enter into a relationship or partnership. By working together they can share resources, power, information, work and support (Sotiriadou et al., 2017). This description closely resembles the resource dependency theory of governance, identified above to be suitable for many DSOs. There are many opportunities for IORs under a traditional model due to the number of organisations involved who are likely all trying to achieve similar goal and strategic outputs. RSOs and DSOs that use a traditional model would likely be motivated to form an IOR for reciprocity or efficiency reasons, while a NSO may enter for the same reasons or to exercise more power over the DSOs and RSOs. Under a traditional model, there are so many organisations involved that are all competing for scarce financial resources from the government, sponsors or lottery grants. Babiak (2007)

suggested IORs can help these organisations feel more financially secure and funding can be applied for collectively. A number of DSOs from the same region could form an IOR with their RSO and the NSO to share their knowledge and apply for funding, while the NSO could encourage the DSOs and RSO to align their strategy with theirs.

IORs could also be crucial for RSOs as they work with their DSOs. It seems a drawback of the traditional model is the DSOs may not get enough support from the RSO, but if they enter into IORs, the DSO may feel reassured that they have a good relationship and support when needed. By entering into an IOR with other DSOs, they will also be able to gather support and knowledge from each other, instead of primarily relying on the RSO.

Once a number of organisations agree to enter into an IOR, formal controls and social processes can help manage the relationship. Among sport organisations, mutual trust, communication and commitment are more prevalent processes of management (Babiak & Thibault, 2008) but this may be difficult as some interviewees referenced possible personality clashes among RSOs. If this is the case, more formal controls, such as written guidelines and reports may help ensure the success of the IOR.

Many people often overlook the importance of evaluating IORs (Parent & Harvey, 2009) and it is quite possible this could happen in an IOR between a number of DSOs, a RSO and a NSO. It is possible that if organisations focus on the outputs of the IOR, evaluation could only take place when things go wrong.

#### *4.22 District Model*

The district model was labelled based on its three-tier structure where many DSOs are affiliated directly to the NSO. Clubs are affiliated to the DSOs and RSOs do not exist. SNZ is one of very few NSOs to operate with the district model, GymSport being the only other sport to do so. The district model requires NSOs to work directly with a number of DSOs, often more than 20. SNZ has always used the District model to manage their relationships with associations, and currently has approximately 22<sup>2</sup> affiliated DSOs.

Tim believes that the district model seems to be working for SNZ at the moment, and states they do not get a lot of complaints about it. Tim and Geoff both believe that a key benefit of the district model is that all the DSOs feel involved in SNZ activities, as they are in regular communication with the NSO and get to vote on matters at Annual and Special General Meetings. Karen believes that having a voice at a national level is important for all DSOs. Rylee adds that she likes the district model as she feels connected with the NSO.

Geoff and Rylee both stated that a positive aspect of the district structure is that tournaments are spread across the whole country, as the fourteen annual domestic tournaments are held in different associations each year. Geoff suggests the DSOs take great pride in these tournaments and he enjoys seeing small associations host big tournaments.

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<sup>2</sup> This number may vary between seasons based on the number of associations that are financially affiliated to Softball New Zealand. 22 is an approximate number provided by Softball New Zealand for the 2017/2018 season.

Tim believes another strength of the district model is the NSO involvement in the DSOs, meaning the NSO is always aware on what is going on around the whole country and there is a more direct route to athletes at a grassroots level. Valerie expressed how much she liked the district model, believing it is great for smaller associations as they get regular direct contact with SNZ who provide valuable assistance. Nicole and Valerie both believe it provides a great basis for DSOs to have some autonomy and independence while still receiving help from the national body when needed. Valerie also likes the district model as it encourages talented players to stay with their home association.

A number of interview participants stated that a key drawback of the district model is that SNZ doesn't have the resources to have successful relationships with all 22 of their affiliated DSOs. Tim believes staff and time resections have limited SNZ capabilities and has resulted in many DSOs not having rewarding relationships with SNZ. Tim stated that this had become even more prevalent as they have recently lost four staff due to a reduction in funding, and many of those staff worked directly with DSOs. Tim accepts that rewarding relationships are sometimes impacted by a lack of communication from the DSO, but he believes that 22 associations may be too many for a NSO to successfully work with. He believes that employing more staff may resolve this issue but that is heavily dependent on funding. It is also possible that more face-to-face communication would further improve relationships but Tim recognises that time limits the possibility of this.

Geoff identified that a negative aspect of the district model is the variance in skill at many softball tournaments. He recalls some scenarios where strong DSOs, such as Canterbury and



Auckland, play smaller, weaker DSOs, such as Tairāwhiti and Central Otago, where the game is only played for three or four innings before being called off early due to the mercy rule (one team ahead by 15 or 20 runs, deemed unable to chase so the game is ended). Karen believes that the district model is “dated and not very modern”.

Members of the hockey community who were interviewed were also asked whether they believed HNZ should return to a district model, but there was consensus that it would not be a good idea, Cameron stating it might be like “taking a step back into the past”. He would rather see HNZ make adjustments to their traditional model than return to a district model.

As suggested when discussing the traditional model, it is likely that boards of DSOs adopt a resource dependency theory of governance, as often they cannot operate alone and rely on support from the NSO to maintain operations. NSOs that operate with a district model would likely not adopt an agency or stakeholder theory of governance due to the number of affiliated DSOs (more than 20). It is also likely that they do not operate with a resource dependency theory as they are more independent than DSOs and RSOs, or an institutional model as they have not changed or adapted a lot in the last few years (being one of only two sports to not have RSOs). It is, however, possible and likely for a NSO to adopt a power theory of governance. As Pettigrew and McNulty (1995) suggest, the power of board members is shaped by the effects of structural and contextual factors, skill in mobilising power, and skill and will in converting power into influence. It is quite possible, under a district model, that different NSO boards have different levels of power, and those boards

that can mobilise their power successfully set the strategic direction for the sport while maintaining positive relationships with NSO staff.

IORs could improve the success of a district model of governance as DSOs could work together and help each other, taking some of the pressure off NSO staff and resources. IORs could also involve clubs, as they could work with DSOs or other clubs to achieve similar goals. The potentiality of IORs under a district model of governance is evident and may resolve a few issues faced by NSOs and DSOs.

#### *4.23 Regional Model*

With a regional model, NSOs work with a small number of RSOs, who have affiliated clubs and DSOs do not exist. Athletics is one of few sports in New Zealand that has adopted this model. There are eleven RSOs affiliated to Athletics New Zealand, and 185 clubs affiliated to those RSOs (Athletics New Zealand, 2017). The Waikato Bay of Plenty region has the most clubs affiliated, with 36 clubs registered in the region. Although Waikato Bay of Plenty may not be the most populous region in New Zealand, it covers a large geographical area which includes a lot of the central North Island. Auckland is the second biggest region in terms of affiliated clubs, with 35 clubs and Wellington is third with 25 clubs (Athletics New Zealand, 2017).

A regional model of governance was not directly mentioned in any of the interviews however some comments can be referenced against it. Benefits of a regional model would

likely be similar to those of the traditional model in the fact that the NSO only has to work with a small number of affiliated associations, and there would likely be a strong focus in high performance. It is possible that the high performance pathway could be less clear as the jump from club sport to a regional representative team could be quite considerable. There is also likely a lot of work put onto RSOs as they have a considerable number of clubs to support across a large geographical distance. Without DSOs to support the relationships, it may be difficult for RSOs to truly support the clubs. It is also likely, under a regional model, that tournaments and events would be assigned to regions, and likely the biggest city in that region. This means that many smaller cities in the region may not get to host national tournaments; something softball associations consider a privilege.

A NSO operating under a regional model could possibly adopt a stakeholder theory of governance. As the NSO board only has up to twelve RSOs to work with, considering their thoughts and ideas is certainly a manageable task. It would also allow the NSO to manage relationships with other key stakeholders including sponsors, staff, local and national governments, and volunteers. Most other models do not provide an easy environment for stakeholder theory due to the number of DSOs involved in the sport, but it may work for a NSO that uses a regional model.

Sports that operate a regional model of governance could benefit from IORs that connect the NSO, RSOs, and Clubs. It is likely that often RSOs are working to achieve similar goals but may be apprehensive to work together. By realising the advantages of IORs, RSOs could

work alongside each other in partnerships to secure funding and share knowledge benefitting all organisations involved.

### 4.3 The context of softball in New Zealand

#### 4.3.1 Background

According to the SNZ website, the sport of softball originated in 1887 in Chicago, USA. It slowly grew in popularity in the United States and was first played in New Zealand in 1935 by visiting American sailors (Softball New Zealand, n.d.a). The first organised competitions took place in 1937 in Wellington, and the sport rapidly spread across New Zealand after that. In 1938 the New Zealand (Baseball) softball council was formed, eventually evolving into Softball New Zealand as it is known today (Softball New Zealand, n.d.a).

Softball is considered to be a minority sport in New Zealand. In terms of participation, the most recent annual report stated SNZ had 34,635 affiliated members (Softball New Zealand, 2016). In recent years, softball has had a regular but relatively small growth in numbers each year, most evident in school/junior grades and the social grades. One challenge SNZ is working through is figuring out how to cater for the growing desire for pay-to-play sport and more social and shortened forms of activity (Softball New Zealand, 2016). SNZ staff member Geoff stated “we’re trying to adapt to changes in the sporting environment. We had over

33,000 people participate in non-affiliated softball<sup>3</sup> in the last year, which is great but we don't know what to do with those numbers".

In July 2017, the New Zealand Black Sox (New Zealand's top men's softball team) won the world championships by beating Australia 6-4 (Softball New Zealand, 2017). New Zealand has long been dominant in men's softball on the world stage, winning seven world championship titles and regularly occupying the world number one ranking. The New Zealand women's team are ranked fifth in the world and have won one world championship title (Softball New Zealand, 2017). SNZ has a strong focus on high performance, as evidenced by Tim's comment "we put a lot of effort into ensuring we are competitive on the international stage. Our men consistently perform well and that is something we are incredibly proud of". This is reflected in SNZ's strategic plan, as a key objective is to create champion athletes and coaches on the international stage (Softball New Zealand, 2014). By selecting nine national teams (at different age groups) to compete internationally, Geoff believes New Zealand are showing they "are a bit of a softball powerhouse" in the international arena and achieving their mission of being "a champion sport on and off the diamond".

#### *4.32 Goals and values of SNZ*

According to SNZ's strategic plan, their mission is to be a "champion sport on and off the diamond" (Softball New Zealand, 2014, p.2). They aim to achieve this by focussing on growing and developing participation, growing their business, connecting softball nationally

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<sup>3</sup> Non-affiliated softball includes softball sessions delivered in school class times (KiwiSport), marae softball, special needs softball and any other softball competitions or activities associations are aware of that do not affiliate to a SNZ association.

and creating champion athletes and coaches on the international stage (Softball New Zealand, 2014).

Tim stated that “we’re proud of how softball connects the community in New Zealand. It’s a family sport and it becomes a real part of family life”. This is reflected in SNZ’s strategic plan by aiming to use clubs to promote softball as a family sport (Softball New Zealand, 2014). It was noted by Rylee that often, teams are made up of siblings from the same family, and it is not uncommon to see people playing with their cousins, parents or other relatives in club competitions in the weekends. The national teams also have a strong family element about them, with three brothers, Thomas, Campbell and Ben Enoka all playing for the Black Sox, and family members Courtney and Melanie Gettins playing for the White Sox (which is coached by Kevin Gettins).

Insights into SNZ’s membership has shown that softball is generally more common in lower socio-economic areas. Nicole stated “two of our top softball parks are placed right next to sewage plants in poorer areas of the city. A lot of our membership comes from the lower or working class”. Based on strategic documents from SNZ, they are aware of the demographic of their membership and have put onus on clubs to attract members from their own community (Softball New Zealand, 2014; Softball New Zealand, 2017). It was also discovered that softball share a lot of members with rugby league, Nicole adding that a lot of people play softball in the summer and rugby league in the winter months. Many softball clubs aim to work alongside rugby league clubs and organise teams to play in both sports.

#### *4.33 Governance of SNZ*

SNZ is governed by a board consisting of seven people; a president, a chairperson, a vice chairperson and four board members. Four board members were elected and three were appointed (Softball New Zealand, n.d.b). Rylee stated that “the board seem to be pretty good. I think they’ve got good strategic direction and it all seems very formalised and official. I trust them”. Nicole added “generally, I think the board a good. Individually, some of the members I’m unsure about, but collectively they do what’s best for softball”. Five staff are employed by SNZ to manage operations, a CEO, General Manager, Events and National Teams Manager, Accounts Manager and a High Performance Director (Softball New Zealand, n.d.b). According to a SNZ policy document, the CEO attends most board meetings but does not officially sit on the board and does not have voting power (Softball New Zealand, 2009). No documents could be found that outlined CEOs function, roles and direct responsibilities. It can be questioned whether the CEO of SNZ has some influence on board decisions, but, as identified in the literature by Edward and Cornforth (2003), the strategic and operational roles of the board often become blurred. This could mean that the SNZ CEO is bringing operational matters into the board agenda, or bringing governance and strategic issues into managerial operations.

The SNZ board seems to be relatively similar to many other NSO boards in New Zealand. Triathlon New Zealand and Tennis New Zealand both have boards of eight people, four of which are appointed and four elected (Tennis New Zealand, n.d.a; Triathlon New Zealand, n.d.). HNZ has eight but five are elected and three are appointed members (Hockey New Zealand, n.d.). Based on the research, it seems that most NSO boards have between seven and nine board members with a relatively even split of elected/appointed members.

The power theory of governance seems to closely fit the governance style used by SNZ.

Hoye and Cuskelly (2003) suggest the strategic role of board is influenced by a number of factors including alterations to board composition, so after an AGM, as new board members are elected or appointed, the strategic role of the board changes. The individual ability of board member can also impact the strategic capability of the board (Pettigrew & McNulty, 1995). This is interesting as Nicole expressed her uncertainty about the individual abilities of some SNZ board members. Despite this matter, it seems the SNZ board harnesses its power in other ways, particularly in stakeholder representation. SNZ has seven board members and, although seven to nine board members is quite standard, sometimes those seven people have to represent a much larger membership. Softball is quite small in membership compared to other sports in New Zealand and those seven board members seem to represent SNZ's stakeholders well. Even though the SNZ CEO often attends board meetings, the board likely has sufficient power to determine strategic direction. I trust that this is the case based on how interview participants expressed their support of the board.

#### *4.34 Associations*

Tim and Geoff both stated that a lot of SNZ's DSOs operate under dated governance practices and are managed by older people. For this reason, Tim believes that inducing change can be very difficult. Tim recalls that even small policy and governance changes can face significant apprehension from the affiliated DSOs. Geoff and Tim both suggested SNZ often faces resistance and a lack of 'buy in'. Tim stated that associations often think for themselves and are not concerned with the needs of the sport as a whole. He suggests that the association associations think "if it doesn't benefit me directly, I'm not interested".



Recent literature would argue that this issue could be resolved with collaborative governance (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015; Shilbury et al., 2016). By involving DSOs in setting the strategic direction of SNZ, there could be more support of a whole-of-sport governance approach. Even if this is just done on a minor scale, not quite collaborative governance, but some collaboration in determining strategic goals could improve issues with association 'buy in'.

Tim also believes that short-term costs (despite potential long-term savings) inhibit DSOs from supporting change proposed by SNZ. Nicole believes DSOs may also be resistant to change because they don't have the organisational capacity to manage and enforce the change within their DSO. Geoff believes that if SNZ wanted to change the model under which they operate it would take a long time and a lot of convincing of DSO staff and members. Karen believes SNZ will face a lot of backlash initially but the associations may change their mind eventually.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Despite New Zealand softball teams' international success, SNZ has to remain focussed on matters back home and determine how they will work with their affiliated associations and what governance model is most suitable for them.

The unitary model is quite uncommon in New Zealand, as only Triathlon New Zealand use it. The federal model is more popular and has three forms, traditional model, district model and regional model. The traditional model is the most popular in New Zealand as most sports have adopted it. HNZ moved to the traditional model over ten years ago and consensus suggests it is successful despite some drawbacks. The regional model is another option but is also very uncommon in New Zealand, only found in athletics. The district model is only used by two sports in New Zealand, softball being one of them. Although there were a number of benefits identified by interview participants, a considerable drawback of the district model was that SNZ have to manage relationships with 22 DSOs. This was always a challenge for SNZ but is getting more difficult due to a recent reduction in staff numbers. Despite SNZ's current district model of governance seeming effective at present, a recent reduction in staff who work with DSOs will likely mean that relationships will be strained. SNZ may simply not have the resources to maintain such a high number of positive relationships with only five staff members and a strategic direction that is changing. Due to these changes, it could be timely for SNZ to consider a different model.

When analysing which model of governance SNZ should adopt, one could rule out the unitary model, as it is not popular in New Zealand, does not seem suitable for team sports, and removes the existence of clubs and DSOs. The district model that they currently use is likely unsustainable due to limited resources. The regional model may also be inappropriate as it removes DSOs, organisation that take a lot of pride and have close relationships with clubs in the SNZ context.

A traditional model of governance is the best model for SNZ to adopt. Considering a recent decrease in staff, it is unlikely that SNZ will have the organisational capacity to sufficiently support 22 DSOs but, if this number became eight RSOs, it would certainly become more manageable. SNZ's power theory of governance would suitably fit a traditional model of governance. To overcome some drawbacks of the traditional model of governance, IORs can be employed to ensure DSOs are well supported. If SNZ adopts a traditional model, DSOs and RSOs should work together and form IORs to support each other. If DSOs create IORs between themselves, it could take a lot of pressure off the RSOs. DSOs could share resources and support each other considering they are all working towards similar goals. DSOs can also form IORs with RSOs to ensure they are being adequately supported and can comfortably ask for help from an organisation higher up in the hierarchy. NSOs can also be involved in IORs to help support the other organisations and share resources, or even exert power over the RSOs and DSOs. So long as organisations follow a correct procedure, identify their motivations early, manage the IOR with formal and informal controls, and regularly evaluate their relationship, there should be no issue with the success of the IOR.

Despite a prevalence of sport governance research, this is the first study in New Zealand to connect sport governance theories, structural models of sport governance and interorganisational relationships. Ethical, time and resource restrictions meant this study could not encapsulate and more than it has. Further research into structural models of governance could prove very worthwhile for the sport sector and sporting academic literature. Particular focus could be on the unitary model and regional model as they were not as prevalent in this study. Future research could also further connect interorganisational relationships to sport governance because, as identified in this research, they are academic theories that can easily interlink.

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